

Puddocky

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

German

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There was once upon a time a poor woman who had one little daughter called 'Parsley.' She was so called because she liked eating parsley better than any other food, indeed she would hardly eat anything else. Her poor mother hadn't enough money always to be buying parsley for her, but the child was so beautiful that she could refuse her nothing, and so she went every night to the garden of an old witch who lived near and stole great branches of the coveted vegetable, in order to satisfy her daughter.

This remarkable taste of the fair Parsley soon became known, and the theft was discovered. The witch called the girl's mother to her, and proposed that she should let her daughter come and live with her, and then she could eat as much parsley as she liked. The mother was quite pleased with this suggestion, and so the beautiful Parsley took up her abode with the old witch.

One day three Princes, whom their father had sent abroad to travel, came to the town where Parsley lived and perceived the beautiful girl combing and plaiting her long black hair at the window. In one moment they all fell hopelessly in love with her, and longed ardently to have the girl for their wife; but hardly had they with one breath expressed their desire than, mad with jealousy, they drew their swords and all three set upon each other. The struggle was so violent and the noise so loud that the old witch heard it, and said at once 'Of course Parsley is at the bottom of all this.'

And when she had convinced herself that this was so, she stepped forward, and, full of wrath over the quarrels

and feuds Parsley's beauty gave rise to, she cursed the girl and said, 'I wish you were an ugly toad, sitting under a bridge at the other end of the world.'

Hardly were the words out of her mouth than Parsley was changed into a toad and vanished from their sight. The Princes, now that the cause of their dispute was removed, put up their swords, kissed each other affectionately, and returned to their father.

The King was growing old and feeble, and wished to yield his sceptre and crown in favour of one of his sons, but he couldn't make up his mind which of the three he should appoint as his successor. He determined that fate should decide for him. So he called his three children to him and said, 'My dear sons, I am growing old, and am weary of reigning, but I can't make up my mind to which of you three I should yield my crown, for I love you all equally. At the same time I would like the best and cleverest of you to rule over my people. I have, therefore, determined to set you three tasks to do, and the one that performs them best shall be my heir. The first thing I shall ask you to do is to bring me a piece of linen a hundred yards long, so fine that it will go through a gold ring.' The sons bowed low, and, promising to do their best, they started on their journey without further delay.

The two elder brothers took many servants and carriages with them, but the youngest set out quite alone. In a short time they came to three cross roads; two of them were gay and crowded, but the third was dark and lonely.

The two elder brothers chose the more frequented ways, but the youngest, bidding them farewell, set out on the dreary road.

Wherever linen was to be bought, there the two elder brothers hastened. They loaded their carriages with bales of the finest linen they could find and then returned home.

The youngest brother, on the other hand, went on his weary way for many days, and nowhere did he come across any linen that would have done. So he journeyed on, and his spirits sank with every step. At last he came to a bridge which stretched over a deep river flowing through a flat and marshy land. Before crossing the bridge he sat down on the banks of the stream and sighed dismally over his sad fate. Suddenly a misshapen toad crawled out of the swamp, and, sitting down opposite him, asked: 'What's the matter with you, my dear Prince?'

The Prince answered impatiently, 'There's not much good my telling you, Puddocky, for you couldn't help me if I did.'

'Don't be too sure of that,' replied the toad; 'tell me your trouble and we'll see.'

Then the Prince became most confidential and told the little creature why he had been sent out of his father's kingdom.

'Prince, I will certainly help you,' said the toad, and, crawling back into her swamp, she returned dragging after her a piece of linen not bigger than a finger, which she lay before the Prince, saying, 'Take this home, and you'll see it will help you.'

The Prince had no wish to take such an insignificant bundle with him; but he didn't like to hurt Puddocky's feelings by refusing it, so he took up the little packet, put it in his pocket, and bade the little toad farewell. Puddocky watched the Prince till he was out of sight and then crept back into the water.

The further the Prince went the more he noticed that the pocket in which the little roll of linen lay became heavier, and in proportion his heart grew lighter. And so, greatly comforted, he returned to the Court of his father, and arrived home just at the same time as his brothers with their caravans. The King was delighted to see them all again, and at once drew the ring from his finger and the trial began. In all the waggon-loads there was not one piece of linen the tenth part of which would go through the ring, and the two elder brothers, who had at first sneered at their youngest brother for returning with no baggage, began to feel rather small. But what were their feelings when he drew a bale of linen out of his pocket which in fineness, softness, and purity of colour was unsurpassable! The threads were hardly visible, and it went through the ring without the smallest difficulty, at the same time measuring a hundred yards quite correctly.

The father embraced his fortunate son, and commanded the rest of the linen to be thrown into the water; then, turning to his children he said, 'Now, dear Princes, prepare yourselves for the second task. You must bring me back a little dog that will go comfortably into a walnut-shell.'

The sons were all in despair over this demand, but as they each wished to win the crown, they determined to do their best, and after a very few days set out on their travels again.

At the cross roads they separated once more. The youngest went by himself along his lonely way, but this time

he felt much more cheerful. Hardly had he sat down under the bridge and heaved a sigh, than Puddocky came out; and, sitting down opposite him, asked, 'What's wrong with you now, dear Prince?'

The Prince, who this time never doubted the little toad's power to help him, told her his difficulty at once. 'Prince, I will help you,' said the toad again, and crawled back into her swamp as fast as her short little legs would carry her. She returned, dragging a hazel nut behind her, which she laid at the Prince's feet and said, 'Take this nut home with you and tell your father to crack it very carefully, and you'll see then what will happen.' The Prince thanked her heartily and went on his way in the best of spirits, while the little puddock crept slowly back into the water.

When the Prince got home he found his brothers had just arrived with great waggon-loads of little dogs of all sorts. The King had a walnut shell ready, and the trial began; but not one of the dogs the two eldest sons had brought with them would in the least fit into the shell. When they had tried all their little dogs, the youngest son handed his father the hazel-nut, with a modest bow, and begged him to crack it carefully. Hardly had the old King done so than a lovely tiny dog sprang out of the nutshell, and ran about on the King's hand, wagging its tail and barking lustily at all the other little dogs. The joy of the Court was great. The father again embraced his fortunate son, commanded the rest of the small dogs to be thrown into the water and drowned, and once more addressed his sons. 'The two most difficult tasks have been performed. Now listen to the third and last: whoever brings the fairest wife home with him shall be my heir.'

This demand seemed so easy and agreeable and the reward was so great, that the Princes lost no time in setting forth on their travels. At the cross roads the two elder brothers debated if they should go the same way as the youngest, but when they saw how dreary and deserted it looked they made up their minds that it would be impossible to find what they sought in these wilds, and so they stuck to their former paths.

The youngest was very depressed this time and said to himself, 'Anything else Puddocky could have helped me in, but this task is quite beyond her power. How could she ever find a beautiful wife for me? Her swamps are wide and empty, and no human beings dwell there; only frogs and toads and other creatures of that sort.' However, he sat down as usual under the bridge, and this time he sighed from the bottom of his heart.

In a few minutes the toad stood in front of him and asked, 'What's the matter with you now, my dear Prince?'

'Oh, Puddocky, this time you can't help me, for the task is beyond even your power,' replied the Prince.

‘Still,’ answered the toad, ‘you may as well tell me your difficulty, for who knows but I mayn’t be able to help you this time also.’

The Prince then told her the task they had been set to do. ‘I’ll help you right enough, my dear Prince,’ said the little toad; ‘just you go home, and I’ll soon follow you.’ With these words, Puddocky, with a spring quite unlike her usual slow movements, jumped into the water and disappeared.

The Prince rose up and went sadly on his way, for he didn’t believe it possible that the little toad could really help him in his present difficulty. He had hardly gone a few steps when he heard a sound behind him, and, looking round, he saw a carriage made of cardboard, drawn by six big rats, coming towards him. Two hedgehogs rode in front as outriders, and on the box sat a fat mouse as coachman, and behind stood two little frogs as footmen. In the carriage itself sat Puddocky, who kissed her hand to the Prince out of the window as she passed by.

Sunk deep in thought over the fickleness of fortune that had granted him two of his wishes and now seemed about to deny him the last and best, the Prince hardly noticed the absurd equipage, and still less did he feel inclined to laugh at its comic appearance.

The carriage drove on in front of him for some time and then turned a corner. But what was his joy and surprise when suddenly, round the same corner, but coming towards him, there appeared a beautiful coach drawn by six splendid horses, with outriders, coachmen, footmen and other servants all in the most gorgeous liveries, and seated in the carriage was the most beautiful woman the Prince had ever seen, and in whom he at once recognised the beautiful Parsley, for whom his heart had formerly burned. The carriage stopped when it reached him, and the footmen sprang down and opened the door for him. He got in and sat down beside the beautiful Parsley, and thanked her heartily for her help, and told her how much he loved her.

And so he arrived at his father’s capital, at the same moment as his brothers who had returned with many carriage-loads of beautiful women. But when they were all led before the King, the whole Court with one consent awarded the prize of beauty to the fair Parsley.

The old King was delighted, and embraced his thrice fortunate son and his new daughter-in-law tenderly, and appointed them as his successors to the throne. But he commanded the other women to be thrown into the water and drowned, like the bales of linen and the little dogs. The Prince married Puddocky and reigned long and happily with her, and if they aren't dead I suppose they are living still.

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